

INTERVIEW: Mrs. Tom F. (Marge) Brown

INTERVIEWER: Pat Young

COPY HAS BEEN EDITED BY MRS. BROWN

YOUNG: This is an interview with Marge Brown for the Historical Society of Palm Desert Oral History Project by Patricia Young. The date is January 22, 1980 and the time is 10 o'clock in the morning. The interview is taking place in Mrs. Brown's home in Marrakesh, off Portola in Palm Desert.

All right, you were telling me a little bit about why you first came here and that you actually knew the Hendersons and that's why you came. Do you want to talk about. . .

BROWN: It was just that my husband knew Cliff Henderson. We came down for the opening of the Shadow Mountain Club and I think that that was my first time in Palm Desert, and we liked it so well and we'd come down with June and Bob Crooker. They had a house here, and we met Edith Eddy Ward and she sold us some property which, we built a first house--then built a second, and then we built a third, so we have been here quite a while. It was in '47 that we came to California.

YOUNG: Do you remember the opening of the Shadow Mountain Club?

BROWN: Yes. At the opening we had--Edgar Bergen at our table, and Ed Gardner who had Duffy's Tavern. There was Hedda Harper there who wrote for the papers, also at our table.

YOUNG: What actually happened at the opening?

BROWN: They just had a dinner. I couldn't tell you anything that actually happened except that Cliff Henderson carried a little starlet over the door when they cut the ribbon. He was not married to Marian Marsh then. I rather imagine that Carl and Edna Henderson were at the table; also Bob and June Crooker were there. Kay and Jerry Malone had the first gasoline station 76 Union Oil and they are still here.

YOUNG: You were telling me a little bit about what Shadow Mountain Club was like in the early days.

BROWN: In the early days, there weren't as many people here as there are now and they used to have movies outside at night, on the grass, and we had a little snack bar and you could come up there and get something to eat and everybody would bring out chairs and also people would bring blankets and things to sit on, and the people in Palm Desert would come and would bring their children and put them to sleep while they were watching the movies. We always had real nice movies; they were old ones but they were ones that we all could enjoy. And that was fun, and of course, everybody met at all the parties and things up there because that was the center of all the activity.

BROWN: Pat and Dudley Steele were such fun. Dudley had been a flyer. He had wonderful trains and he built a train house with windows the kids could look in to watch the trains, on the club grounds. Elizabeth Stewart had a shop at Shadow Mountain. And then, of course, they did change the club. We had the Todds playing there; the Crookers and Tom and I went with Cliff to listen to the Todds. They were playing in Los Angeles, somewhere in Santa Monica, and they came down here and they were here for years, and they were just Art and Dotty Todd. They were a fixture here; everybody knew them and liked them, and sometimes Tom would play the piano so Dotty could dance. It was really just the nicest atmosphere; it was just kind of a family club at the time. The children could go there and everybody was safe. There was not the trouble they are having now everywhere. Lou Kuehner taught most of the young people to swim; he was there for years. I can't tell you much more about it than that. There was always a nice New Year's Eve party and, all through the winter we had nice dances and parties

YOUNG: What did you think of Palm Desert when you first saw it?

BROWN: I wouldn't be able to say what I thought of it because I liked it. I always have liked warm weather. When we first came down, we used to sun bathe, and then you stopped doing that because it is not good for your skin. It certainly was different then than it is now, and there were very few roads; just the things Patton had cut through--that's the reason they are in the condition they are; they weren't ever started out--this way north and south and that way east and west; they just went all around. Firecliff was here, and Mrs. Werder had the Shadow Mountain Terrace and then there was the Twin Palms. There were about, one other place and they was just about the only places to stay. I think Edie Ward owned one place at one time but she had sold it before we came down here. Her mother was quite a wonderful woman. She was an artist; Edie Ward's mother, Bunny Ward, and Edie knew everybody. She was Miss Palm Desert in real estate. I don't know how many years ago she died. Her mother died before that, but her mother came out here in a covered wagon. They were a nice family. Oh so many of the people that were here to start with are gone or died.

YOUNG: You were telling me about some of the places over on the other side of 111, such as Anne Carpenters.

BROWN: Yes, Milt Hunter and Lorna had a little restaurant where--everybody went for breakfast, or Marianne's restaurant. There was another place very close--a little place, and they were practically the only places where you could eat outside of Shadow Mountain and Firecliff. You could cross the highway without any danger of being run over. Did Anne tell you about her little dog? She had two cockers. They would wander across the highway when we were building and my husband always called them the inspectors because they would come across when the fellows that worked, the carpenters, were eating lunch and they'd get something to eat. I guess that was what attracted them, I don't know. They were such cute dogs. That's about all that was, and then the barn where they had all their plays,

where the Little Theatre was, and then afterward it moved over on the other side of 74; they had a place over there that was better built, but it was fun.

YOUNG: Where was the barn?

BROWN: We, you'd have to ask Anne Carpenter that, because-- you went down past the Village Market, where it was. They've torn all those things down. She would know, because she was one of the actors and actresses.

YOUNG: You were telling me a bit about what the evening consisted of, when you'd go to the Barn.

BROWN: They'd have these plays. I can't even remember what some of the plays were but they were cute plays, and then between acts, they'd have coffee and cookies or sandwiches, and there probably in the whole place wouldn't be over 35 or 40 people. But everybody practically knew each other; we knew all of the people that were in all of the plays, and all of the audience. And they'd have a lot of fun; they'd hiss at the villains -- it was just like a little country down here when we first came. It just was so nice. When you look at it now, you can't believe it.

YOUNG: It has changed all right.

BROWN: Time goes on.

YOUNG: You were talking also about the churches.

BROWN: Well, I'm not sure, but as far as I know, the only other church besides the Community Church, which was really Presbyterian service, was called community, I think the only other church was the Catholic Church. I know the Lutheran Church came in afterward, and the Episcopal Church came in after that. I don't think they had the Christian Science church then. I think that came in later on too. But half of--most everyone that went, unless they went to Palm Springs, and then that afterward became the Retarded Children's location.

YOUNG: You were saying something about how the Women's Club formed down here.

BROWN: Yes, the Women's Club was formed from that. Martin Baker got the girls that were in The Guild, and he got them to form a little group and finally we met over at the Shadow Mountain Club and they finally decided to change the name to--I can't remember what they called it first; and to change it to the Palm Desert Women's Club. I don't know who was the first president. I really don't remember whether Cyria Henderson was--but I don't belong anymore. But then we had, as I said the Library. If you want to put that down; that started over where Airlansea is in just one of the store rooms. Gert Keedy was in it and Randall Henderson and Clarice Cavanagh, and then we finally, after that had been there a little while, we decided to try to build a building, and John Outcault designed it, and I can't remember who was the first president, but I think it was Carl Henderson. We used to meet around at different

people's houses, the ones that were interested, that were on the board, and then finally we had quite a time getting a building because we wanted to put it on the taxes and let everybody with a small house maybe pay \$5 taxes for 5 years, and a larger house would pay more. And the people were against it. Oh, we just had a battle royale down here about it, and they were so against anything about taxes and yet the people that needed and used the library for their children were the ones that were against it. The people willing to pay a little bit; they wanted it. So, finally when we really got it, they were all happy about it. But it really was something there for a little while. The County, of course, furnished the books, but we built the building. And we really have a nice little building there; we had Bill Monday as our caretaker there all those years. He would just do anything; he is so wonderful. He may have some connection with it now-- we gave it to the City and the County. The City of Palm Desert and the County, I guess 4 or 5 years ago--the Board did, because we still owned it. I guess not very many, well I guess some of the Board are left, but not too many, of the ones that built the thing, the ones that paid for it and it was--Hal Kapp was always interested, and Ted Smith; Mr. Welcome and Richard Kite Sr. and Jr.--his son's in real estate now. Anyhow there were eleven of us went on a note and the Bank of America . .

YOUNG: What happened?

BROWN: We had to borrow money at the bank. I think we had to borrow \$65,000; found out later that each one of us was responsible for \$65,000; we didn't know that when we went on it. We each eleven of us were responsible for \$65,000; but we worked hard. We had rummage sales, and we had a sale where every different group in the desert had a booth and they gave a certain percentage of what they sold. We had membership drives and we finally got the money and got it all paid off, but it took a few years. But I think we have a pretty nice library for a small town and to think we built it ourselves; most everybody else's the city has built it or the county has built it, you know. And we weren't very big when we did it.

YOUNG: You were talking about the post office too. You were saying that that had gone through a lot of change.

BROWN: They just keep getting bigger post offices. We'd had the same post box all the time, but now the post office still isn't large enough. They added on a lot of boxes, not too long ago; within the last couple of years, and now they have two different Zip codes. If you have a post box it is 92261 instead of 60. They said that would let the mail go through faster if they could have. . .I don't know whether anybody uses it or not--I do.

YOUNG: Where was the post office to begin with?

BROWN: It was down there near the Market Basket. It was on Larkspur. That was where the first one was. We had a place down there; it was a fish place, right on the highway. They had fresh lobster and shrimp and you could call up and order it, and it was good. We didn't have very many stores. We had Andrews--Dorothy Andrews is still here.

- BROWN: Grace's dress shop has been for years. And they were up, where the hardware store is--beyond the post office, on Highway 111. Then they went down where they had the little Village Market. Then they sold it. We didn't have any chain store here then at all. We did have Safeway in Indio where everybody would go to get their meat and things a lot of the time. You couldn't get everything here by any means. had a hardware store--I think was there quite a while. I don't know when they built that little art gallery. I can't remember when that came in. We've had that quite a while. And we had the little Palm Desert Post newspaper. Chuck Shelton. . Peggy's beauty shop has been here as long as I can remember; Willie Alexander was there for years.
- YOUNG: You were talking about how the post office used to be just boxes--something like that.
- BROWN: Well, no, they've always had boxes, and then people have gotten their mail General Delivery, too. I don't think they do now; I think you get your mail in a post box in front of your house now. But it used to be that people, if they didn't have a box, they'd get it at the window. I don't know how you do it if you just come for a short time. Usually, wherever you're staying, they have a post box out in front of their house, if the people don't have a box. The Post Office was a nice meeting place. But we've always used the post box; we've never gotten out mail at the house. We started a garden club--Garden Club of the Desert, it was called, and I think we've been going about 20 some years now. They've had new; other ones started, but--ours was the first.
- YOUNG: What was the concern of the Garden Club?
- BROWN: Oh, we usually gave scholarships over at the College of the Desert. We work for scholarships for the people taking horticulture and any of those, gardening in any form. And it was a little on the social, getting together. We're still going; still meet once a month. We had Doctors Bill Seals and Bob Morrey here.
- YOUNG: Now, I've heard you've been treasurer of everything that existed.
- BROWN: I was, I think. And I've gone into everything. I have had some nice awards, which is awfully nice. But everything that started, I happened to get into. I was in Children's Home Society, in National Charity League and the Living Desert.
- YOUNG: Talk a little about the Living Desert.
- BROWN: Mr. Phil Boyd really started that. He owned the place across from Marrakesh; he had a ranch. You may have noticed it sometime; it has a windmill on it, and that was his property. He was the first mayor of Palm Springs, and he lives here at Marrakesh. He decided that he'd like to preserve some of the desert; that's what the idea of the thing is --to preserve the desert, and so they got the Coachella Valley Water District to lease--I think we have a lease of 100 years on the property, and I don't know whether he gave--some of it. I know the first

meetings they had, I went to, they had at Firecliff, and then they started in. They haven't had one cent of money from anybody except donations and fund raisings. They haven't had anything from the State. A lot of people think that the government's sponsoring it, but they aren't; but they have had a wonderful lot of retired men that have been successful, so they are the kinds you need to do things. Women can get things done, too, but you get a few men in things and they really get things done. You can see I'm not a Women's Libber. But anyhow, they really have gotten it well done--then McCallum Hall was given by people who are in Palm Springs who have the Museum. They have given us money and we've gotten some from Irvine--those people down there that own what was a ranch at one time, and they have given a lot.

YOUNG: Oh yes.

BROWN: It's growing like everything since it first started. We have been so fortunate in having Karen Sausman because she's a very very smart gal, and she really knows her animals and her desert and everything. I know the first time that I went out with her, we didn't even have a building up there at all. She and I went up; she had a snake in her pocket that she had had, that had something wrong with its eye, and she'd been treating it. We walked out somewhere; and she took the snake out of her pocket and put it down. It was just a little kind of a garter snake, and it wiggled away and went over and got in a tree. Most people wouldn't pick up any kind of a snake. You don't see them. The whole time I've been down here, I've seen one little bit of a sidewinder about six inches in our driveway, and that's the only one I've ever seen. I've seen a coyote--once in the Baker's driveway, and then one time evidently a coyote must have run a rabbit in our entrance thing we had in the back--and I guess the rabbit couldn't get out and the rabbit--just part of it was there, and that's the extent of the wild things I've been near. There used to be, on Shadow Mountain Club golf course, all the green was thick--covered with rabbits at night. You couldn't believe how many there would be--these big jack rabbits, and then they just gradually got less and less--so we now don't have any. I don't know whether I've told you anything of interest or not, because it's just things that I know about. I like the desert; I don't mind the hot weather. Of course, with air conditioning; I wouldn't like it if we didn't have air conditioning.

YOUNG: Was there air conditioning when you first came here?

BROWN: No, there were those desert coolers; the water things that you have on top. No, we didn't have the electric air conditioning, when we first came, but we didn't stay down in the summer. We boarded up, put the silver paper on our windows and doors. We maybe would come down once during the summer, but we didn't come down until the hot weather was over because it was a little miserable. I don't know how the people when they first came here, how they ever liked Indio--I know when we first came out here, we drove through here and it was so hot. And our drive down in September, it was so hot, and then they just had the desert coolers. But we soon got the air conditioning;

it didn't take too long. But as I say, I don't know who-- Anne Carpenter probably knows as many people as anybody here, and I'm telling you, she hasn't changed one bit in all the years I've known her. She's still just as attractive and just as keen--she talked at the Garden Club at Christmastime. She is so clever; I remember when I went in the first time as treasurer up at the Women's Club, she played "Whatever Margie wants, Margie gets". You remember that song, "Lola", whatever it was--the money--that was funny. She always had a cute thing to do for everything.

YOUNG: Are there any other groups you've been involved with that you feel have benefitted the desert here...

BROWN: Oh, I can't think of anything. A lot of things I was in -- of course, I work over at Eisenhower and I work at the Blood Bank and those things, which everybody else does, but everything that started, I like getting into, because as they say, for many years all I did was play cards and go to luncheons and I got down here, why then, of course, when I was first down here, why, there was still a lot of social things, and then gradually I've gotten so that I do the things I really have been wanting to do and I've just stopped playing bridge.

YOUNG: Were you involved in the building of Eisenhower?

BROWN: No, I didn't have anything to do with the building of it. I've worked there since it opened; I was in the Auxiliary. I'm a Life member of the Auxiliary. I've got a pin for 2500 hours and that was year before last year. I've worked there every Thursday since it opened, and before that--before we had Eisenhower, I worked at the Indio Community Auxiliary--I was the first president of that one and that we started. Then we wanted to work both at Eisenhower and Indio, but Indio is on a different kind of schedule and they wouldn't let us work both places, so Eisenhower is so much closer, we decided, a number of us, that we would go to Eisenhower and I've been working with this one girl--she and I have worked every Thursday since it opened. I love the Blood Bank too; they have the nicest people over there to work with.

YOUNG: Is there anything else you would like to talk about?

BROWN: Oh, I can't think of anything. I don't think you want to put all of this stuff down that I've told; I mean that. Of course, I was in the Red Cross. I worked with the Red Cross when I first came down. I was on that board in Indio where we had Red Cross workers and my husband put on the Red Cross drive three years and he got the most, I think, they'd ever gotten because he got all who came down here so he said, "You have to give something down here too", so he shamed them into it.